

T.G. Alexander

Tape 378

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Kathi Irving (KI): This is Kathi Irving. I'm talking to Jay Alexander and Lois Baum. Today is 16 September 2002. We're at Jay's home, 2222 South 1500 West.

Jay and Lois are grandchildren of T.G. Alexander. We're going to talk about T.G. and his ownership of the service station now known as Cobble Rock Station. Jay, please tell me about him building the station.

Jay: I can't tell you the year, but he was in business in Vernal Auto. He acquired the property on the corner and built this service station, and went broke doing it.

KI: He went broke because of the cost of building it?

Jay: Yeah. He probably never had two dollars to open up the deal, but he did get it opened up by liquidating his Bank of Vernal stock to the directors. He sold his Bank of Vernal bank stock to get enough money to open it up. I sure hope that's right.

KI: Do you know who built it, literally put the rocks in there?

Jay: No.

KI: You told me just a minute ago that he got the cobble rock to do the flooring.

Jay: He told me how he put the floor in by placing the rocks in and very little tiny cement over those, but as far as putting the cobble rocks up on the wall, I don't think he did it himself. Now, there's one other person in this town, still alive, that might be able to tell you who did that, Henry Schaefermeyer. Now that's the person that acquired the Chevrolet dealership from T.G.

KI: According to the *Vernal Express*, that was built in about 1925, the Cobble Rock station was. So, can you tell me when you came on the scene and stories you remember that your grandpa might have told you about running that business?

Jay: Well, see, I was twenty years old before I ever went and found my grandpa. He had left the country and lived in Arkansas. I never talked to my grandpa other than in 1959 when he came back here with me. On the way from Arkansas, he would tell me different stories. But he never did come up with the exact date of it. He just told me a couple of incidences, you know, about money and being, he called it "getting in it tight." That's what he called it when he was short of money, is what he would say.

He got the station open and then, I can't tell you how the Bank of Vernal or N.J. Meagher acquired the property back.

KI: It went through several owners, so anywhere along the way it could have been sold.

Jay: And, see, they were trading fast and quick. One day N.J. Meagher had the better deal, the next time Alexander had the better deal. Those are the stories I've been told.

KI: Was your grandpa a mechanic? What do you think was his motivation for building the Cobble Rock station?

Jay: My dad called him a plunger. He would be over here one day and over there the next day. He owned sheep; he owned property on Diamond Mountain and ran sheep; and owned about four different ranches in Dry Fork Canyon that you can go back and document where he had owned them and traded them off. But he was really a rancher farmer that had come to town and started a business venture.

KI: So, when you told me that he had an interest in Vernal Auto, he wasn't an employee? He actually had money invested? He was a part-owner?

Jay: He was an owner. Vernal Auto started out with him and Byron Thomas. Byron Thomas then traded out of it and Grandpa was the owner, to my knowledge. And I'm pretty sure that's right.

KI: Then when I find newspaper articles that say So-and-so is the *manager*, then your grandpa retained ownership, but he was hiring managers for the service station.

Jay: Well, he was probably running the service station, too, because the uncle that just died, see, they would take their cars and light vehicles up a ramp in the building that's still there now and they would work on them up in the top of that building. Well, this uncle of mine, which is Harold Alexander, his boy was at this time big enough to ride a bike. He'd come down the ramp and then Grandpa would catch him before he could hurt somebody running out on the street and he would be chastised bad. That's just another story. But at that time, Grandpa was the operator. My dad was at that time driving a bus to Salt Lake. That's what they did is they had passengers and [were] driving back and forth to Salt Lake.

KI: After a while Vernal Auto went out of business on South Vernal Avenue and Christensens was in there and Penneys. They had the National Guard Armory in that building, but Cobble Rock was still running, the service station. So, what exactly was back there? You told me that you worked there when you were a sophomore.

Jay: I worked for Claude Banks when Claude Banks was the operator. He was the operator of the service station. I worked for him there for one summer.

KI: What was the layout at the time? What did it look like? From the exterior mostly what we see are those arches. What was back underneath there?

Jay: There was two lanes that you could drive through with a car with gas pumps. I think there was two sets of gas pumps, that they put the gas in. Then on the north side, there was two stalls that you would drive in from the north, Highway 40, off of Main Street. One was the grease rack with the hoist to pick the cars up; the other was the wash rack. Then just the next door down, I

think it was Maud's Café. Just a little tiny hamburger joint. They made real good hamburgers there.

KI: I've been wondering what the name of that restaurant was.

Jay: You'd better check it out, but I believe it was Maud's. I think it was Maud's Café.

KI: Was that closer to Vernal Avenue?

Jay: No, that was going east. That was on Main Street going east. That Maud's Café was nothing to do with the service station when I was there employed by Claude.

KI: Those arches went around that whole corner, so you'd have an arch on the Main Street corner and one that just faced the corner and an arch on the South Vernal Avenue side. So, her store was behind the arches but it was clear to the east?

Jay: Well, her café was east of the east arch that was out there like that. There wasn't an arch over the top of the entrance to the grease rack. Boy, I need some pictures! You've probably got some pictures of the Cobble Rock.

KI: I do, but they're only of the exterior. I don't have anything behind the arches.

Jay: I just have to tell you. See, you'd go in there to the till and the cash register, then there was another little room there, I don't know what they used to use it for. At one time there was a, I hate to say this, there was a little tiny coffee shop with a café in there.

Lois: That's what I was thinking.

Jay: There was one in there.

KI: This is not Maud's? This is a different one?

Jay: No, you'd go right through the arch and walk over past the gas pumps and right there there was a little tiny place. But that was before my days. But there was an eating place there and Claude Banks didn't operate it. At this time it wasn't operable.

KI: In other words, this little coffee shop was there *before* Banks?

Jay: When Claude Banks was running the service station, it was there, but there was no service for that. Whoever built or made this deal, I don't know when it quit, see, because I didn't know nothing about that until in the '40s. When I was gone to the Army and stuff, why, Claude was still running the service station, see, then it got closed up.

KI: You went into the service in World War II or Korea?

Jay: No, no, I went to the service in 1957.

KI: Claude was still in there then?

Jay: I'm sure.

KI: Were you living here then, Lois?

Lois: I left here as a young girl, five years old. Part of this, Grandpa, T.G., left Vernal, it would have been after '35, that's when I was born.

Jay: It was 1940 when he left. It could have been '41.

Lois: 1940, was it? We left Vernal right after he disappeared, and [we] moved to Nevada. Also, sometime in that time frame, your uncle George was burned to death.

Jay: No, he was burned in '35.

Lois: But right after he was born they said that Grandpa had problems, and that's one of the reasons he left. He was burned in '35, the year I was born?

Jay: Yes.

KI: Was that because of an explosion at the station?

Jay: No.

Lois: At his home.

KI: Because I did find an article, which I gave to you, that talks about a couple of kids who were burned at the station. I don't remember their names, though.

Lois: He was a college student and he threw fuel on a chicken burner. [Ed note: This was an oil-burning heater used to keep chicks warm.]

Jay: Well, he poured gas on a chicken burner. But when that happened it was at the Quality Dairy that my grandpa built and that was up here on 7th West. See, that's different, and it happened in '35, 'cause I was just barely born in '34.

KI: Now, I'm going to ask you some really basic questions. Since I've only seen just those arches, as far as the Cobble Rock was concerned, was it completely covered? Was there a whole building inside of there that was covered?

Jay: Yes, ma'am.

KI: There was no space where there was just an arch and then a space and a building? The whole thing was covered?

Jay: The arch was there and it was solid building behind the arches. There was no sunshine down behind the arches, it was a roof.

KI: But people went underneath there to get gas, right? That's where the gas pumps were?

Jay: Yeah, you'd drive your car under there to put the gas in your car.

KI: That must have been quite the place because it kept you out of the rain, huh?

Jay: Yeah, it was up-to-date, fancy. I don't know why it didn't keep a-goin'. There was difficulties or something with General Motors and Chevrolet, I don't know. But my grandpa told me that was the best people he had ever dealt with was the Chevrolet division of General Motors.

KI: When he had the station, was he still running Vernal Auto? Was he still selling cars or was he just doing service?

Jay: It must have been right shortly after he built that that he got rid of his Chevrolet dealership, as far as I know. You'd have to go to the *Vernal Express* or something else to find out. Now see, Henry Schaefermeyer could tell you the exact date that he bought him out, and then moved out and went to the Basin Chevrolet. Then I think he sold that to McKinley and two or three people right on down the line.

KI: That certainly happens a lot, all those changes in ownership and people who were managing, that's hard to keep track of.

Jay: Well, my grandfather, he didn't stay in one place very long. He had sheep one day, cows the next day, and dairies the next day.

KI: So, was it your father who had the business where the Top Stop Chevron station is now [722 West Main]? Did you live there?

Jay: Chevron? Okay, right. That's Top Stop now?

KI: Yes.

Jay: Kings built it, right?

KI: I don't know.

Jay: Well, my dad built that house there and I was raised there. He sold that house to Dick Murray. Dick Murray sold it to, I don't know, it would be in the record someplace. Then it was acquired by the Kings and they tore everything down and built the service station. I, myself, owned the lot right behind that and I sold that to an insurance man here in town.

KI: Somebody told me that you had an old barn that you moved out here.

Jay: Yeah, I moved it from the dairy property. It's that barn that you see right out here. That barn was built in 1910 by S.D. Colton. This is the house, on 670 West Main, that was right in front of the dairy, Quality Dairy, and this was the barn that was there. Then Grandpa added to that and built his dairy barn. There's pictures.

KI: Oh, I'm always in favor of looking at pictures.

End of tape.